Five areas that corporate real estate leaders should be thinking about today

COVID-19 implications for corporate real estate

The COVID-19 crisis is a pivotal point in time. While organizations are taking steps to keep their employees safe and operations running, a new normal will likely emerge that may be nothing like it is today. How people work may change. How people interact with one another may change. How real estate teams plan for and manage workplaces will likely be different. To begin planning a recovery response, we have identified five areas that corporate real estate (CRE) leaders should be thinking about today:

1. Reentry planning
   As reentry begins, it is expected that employees will go to the office for intentional purposes. The routine work activities that can be handled remotely will continue as such. It is likely that a smaller, more targeted workforce will come back in a meaningful way. Some of the things you should consider include:
   - Develop criteria to determine who should come into the office, to what extent, how often, and when it will be appropriate to bring targeted employees back to the offices
   - Identify the functions and roles that should return to the office
   - Identify which activities are critical to be conducted in-person in the office and understand what activities can’t be performed at home today
   - Deploy change management and communications cascades to drive confidence and motivation for the returning workforce

2. Safety, resilience, and operations
   The health and safety of employees and the cleanliness of facilities will be top of mind for the operations team. The following items should be considered:
   - Develop screening protocols for the workforce and visitors at entrances
   - Revise sanitation procedures and update SLAs to increase frequency of cleaning schedules, especially of common areas and meeting spaces
   - Consider introducing and/or increasing work shifts to reduce density in the office and allowing for facilities staff to sanitize spaces throughout the day
   - Establish safety protocols for isolation and control of sick workers
   - Source and provide for PPE and safety supplies (such as N-95 masks and gloves), as needed

3. Workspace and materials
   Smart technologies can help prevent the spread of illness, monitor wellness, and make employees more productive. Key considerations include:
   - Partner with the IT team to improve digital infrastructure, collaborative technologies, and hardware to support increased connectivity with remote teams
   - Evaluate smart building management capabilities across leased and owned facilities, such as predictive maintenance solutions, air quality sensors, UV cleaning, infrared temperature cameras, and HEPA air filters
   - Evaluate digital twin technology for managing and operating building facilities
   - Utilize reservation systems to provide adequate time for sanitation between bookings

4. Employee experience
   In the current environment, employees may value how employers treat them even more so than in the past. As such, it will be important to maintain focus on their experience and engagement, no matter where they work from. In that regards, consider the following:
   - Enable remote work through appropriate infrastructure, flexible policies, and trainings to make WFH effective for managers and contributors
   - Establish feedback channels and listen to the workforce to understand concerns as conditions change, leveraging analog and automated processes
   - Provide whole-health benefits and a wellness concierge; consider an on-site doctor and supporting spaces
   - Assess opportunities to improve and implement wellness-related building standards and solutions

5. Digital workplace and smart building
The actions needed from corporate real estate organizations will evolve across the entire life cycle of the COVID-19 crisis—from enabling productive home offices in order to progress businesses through uncertain times to creating strategies and implementation plans for the next normal.

**Near-term**

**Respond**
Manage continuity

- Launch a CRE crisis management team to lead the program
- Engage with corporate communication channels and develop messaging for the workforce around facilities and remote work advancements
- Develop facilities maintenance protocols and processes to help ensure employees are and feel safe
- Partner with IT to support remote work with appropriate tools (hardware and software)
- Team with business continuity leaders to identify critical roles that must be in the office and support them with safety procedures, equipment, and guidelines for physical distancing
- Understand the global and local impact on real estate facilities footprint and develop mitigation plans by region

**Short-term**

**Recover**
Learn and emerge stronger

- Collaborate with HR to determine what functions, work, and roles should return to the office and/or could continue to work from home
- Conduct a detailed review of the current portfolio and ascertain the impact of facility closures and subclosures
- Adjust the current workplace standards to provide for appropriate distancing, collaboration, and hygienic behaviors
- Develop reentry plan and criteria, mapping the timing with which employee groups will come back into the office
- Identify opportunities to leverage IoT devices and workplace technology to better enable a safe and healthy environment
- Create a remote performance management plan for teams and train managers and above to lead virtual teams

**Long-term**

**Thrive**
Prepare for the new normal

- Identify opportunities to increase remote work with new hires and evolving flexible working styles
- Implement workplace strategies and solutions aligned to the new ways of working for all roles, including long-term remote working
- Understand the organization’s opportunity to move to or increase shift work to reduce density and optimize individual preferences
- Develop strategies to deploy workplace technology to optimize workspace utilization and facility operations over time
- Develop an implementation roadmap to increase, reduce, and reconfigure the portfolio to optimize the workplace
- Evaluate the long-term impact and rethink design and planning for new build office facilities to incorporate the new normal of workplace behaviors and requirements

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**This is a pivotal moment. How will you emerge?**

**How we can help...**

- Reentry planning: Workforce readiness
- Reentry planning: Real estate strategy
- Digital workplace and smart buildings
- Workplace operations and safety
- Scenario planning and analytics

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